

Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped



BRIGHT FUTURE

SHARE OUR VISION, THAT ALL MAY READ.

Vol. 41, No. 1, Winter 2026



OKLAHOMA
Rehabilitation Services
Oklahoma Library for the Blind and
Physically Handicapped

Coming Soon: The OLBPH
Book Club Podcast
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Letter from the Director

With the holidays and our recent state-wide snow events of early 2026 behind us, we now plow forward (pun intended).

I mentioned in last issue we were in the hiring process for a library public information officer. After 14 first interviews from a list of 30 candidates, five second interviews, and two serious contenders, I am very pleased to have Matt Thurber on board with us. He has an introductory piece further on in this issue. The library is fully staffed once again. That makes me happy.

With new beginnings also comes life's twilight events. We had a centurion patron pass away in November. His son gave us a note saying that in the last decade of his dad's life he suffered blindness due to glaucoma. Having our library services made these years much more enjoyable. He used the words steadfast and reliable regarding librarians and others helping with his reading desires. This too, while sad up front, has a happy element knowing we improved a man's quality of life in his last years.

The Oklahoma Rehabilitation Services (DRS) is all about quality-of-life improvement, specifically in the world of disability. On February 11, 2026, the library hosted the monthly DRS Commission Meeting. This proved to be a great opportunity to showcase how the Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (OLBPH) fits in the DRS service spectrum. Apart from Commissioner Flannery, our commissioners currently serving were not around when the OLBPH received the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS) Regional Library of the Year Award in 2019. Our services have kept improving since then. Those interested were given a tour after the commission meeting to get a deeper perspective of what we provide and how we operate. The more people we educate about us, the more ambassadors we gain to help spread the library creed across Oklahoma.

- Kevin Treese

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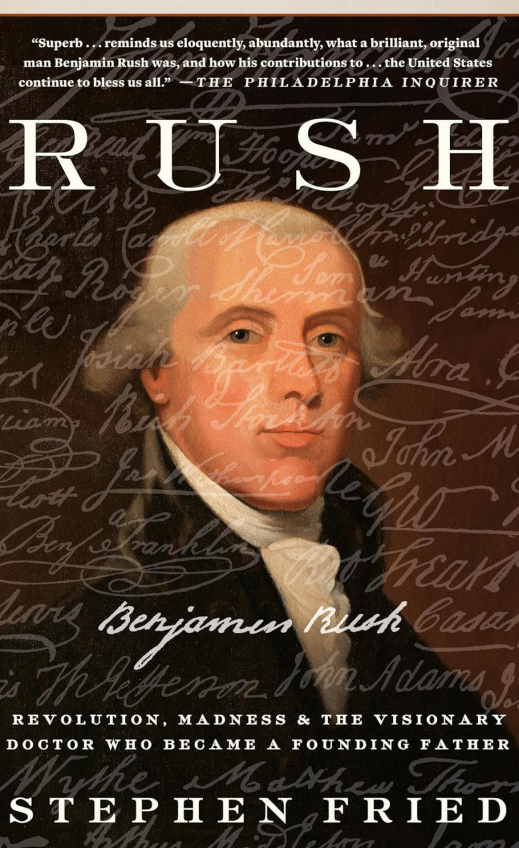
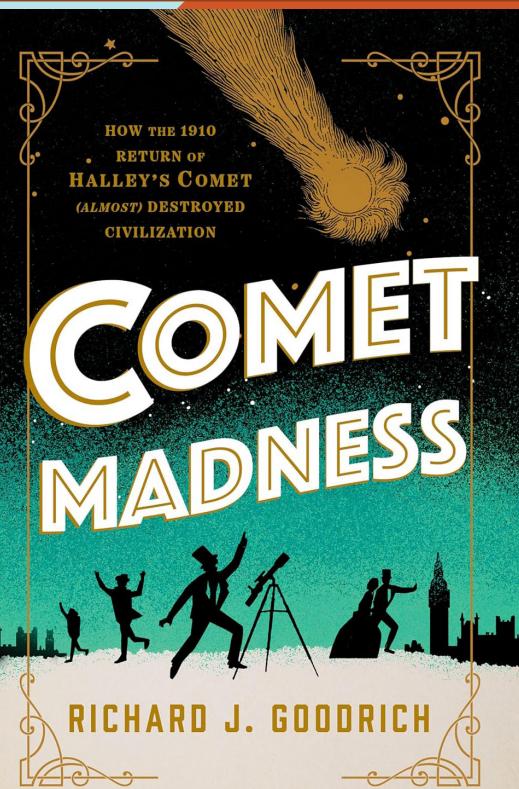
Book Corner *March Madness!*

The Wisdom of Madness by C.J. Archer DB113050

“With Alice determined to discover the truth about her past, and Seth determined to help her, the couple find themselves sucked into a world where nothing is as it seems and no one can be trusted. On the run to escape a mad queen’s wrath, and with an entire realm looking for them, tensions fray and friendships are tested. Even worse for Seth, shocking secrets he’d rather leave buried are brought to the surface. Joined on their adventure by an irritable Gus and a mysterious Eva, the four friends must learn the truth of Alice’s past so she can forge her future. But a future with whom? And where?” -- Provided by publisher.

A Family Madness by Thomas Keneally DB024429

Terry Delaney, an Australian part-time rugby player, supplements his match fees by doing free-lance security work. His comfortable life is upset when he falls in love with Danielle, daughter of the charismatic owner of a competing security firm. This newfound passion wrecks his marriage and leads to ultimate horror.



A Madness of Sunshine by Nalini Singh DB097880

After her husband's death, Anahera Rawiri returns to her remote New Zealand hometown of Golden Cove. She learns a local woman has disappeared and cop Will Gallagher fears there might be a connection to another missing persons case from years before.

The Book of Madness and Cures by Regina O'Melveny DB074790

Venice, 1590. Gabriella Mondini has received another letter from her physician father, ten years after he left her and her mother. Tired of feeling abandoned, Gabriella sets out to trace his movements through his old letters. Along the way, she learns about the art of medicine.

Comet Madness: How the 1910 Return of Halley's Comet (Almost) Destroyed Civilization by Richard Goodrich DB117343

"In Comet Madness, author and historian Richard J. Goodrich examines the 1910 appearance of Halley's Comet and the ensuing frenzy sparked by media manipulation, bogus science, and outright deception. The result is a fascinating and illuminating narrative history that underscores how we behave in the face of potential calamity - then and now." -- Provided by publisher.

Pilgrim's Wilderness: A True Story of Faith and Madness on the Alaska Frontier by Tom Kizzia DB077638

Journalist chronicles the life of Robert "Papa Pilgrim" Hale, a Christian fundamentalist, who moved his wife and fifteen children to Alaska in 2002. Discusses Hale's run-ins with neighbors and officials and federal agents' discoveries of abuse in the Hale household.

Rush: Revolution, Madness, and the Visionary Doctor Who Became a Founding Father by Stephen Fried DB092297

Portrait of Benjamin Rush, one of America's Founding Fathers, who is also known for his medical career, throughout which he pioneered national healthcare and advanced the treatment of patients with mental illness or addiction issues. Also discusses his opposition to slavery, capital punishment, and more.

New Employee Spotlight

Matt Thurber, Public Information Officer

Matt Thurber joins the Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped with more than a decade of experience working for nonprofits including The American Red Cross and The Salt Lake City Arts Council. More recently, Matt worked in the energy sector as a Marketing and Communications professional.

Born and raised in Salt Lake City, Utah, Matt developed an affinity for libraries and books from a young age. Some of his earliest memories



of books include titles from acclaimed authors and illustrators such as Richard Scarry, Roald Dahl, and Shel Silverstein.

Inspired by American authors and

figures such as Jack Kerouac, Woody Guthrie, John Steinbeck, Edward Abbey, and Mark Twain, Matt hit the open road in search of greener pastures. What he experienced in Oklahoma was unlike anywhere else he had seen while exploring the states.

Matt first entertained the idea of relocating to Oklahoma following a series of road trips throughout the West and South including notable stops along Route 66. He was well familiar with the “Life is a Journey, Not a Destination” phrase often attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson, but didn’t

fully embrace the philosophical concept as a personal mantra until the middle of 2025.

“I remember pulling over one day to get a closer look at the Canadian River. I was amazed at the river’s magnitude and surrounding beauty which seemed unique to Oklahoma,” said Matt, who began work as the library’s new Public Information Officer (PIO) the week following Thanksgiving. “One of my favorites drives is the stretch between Tulsa and Oklahoma City along Route 44. I still make it a point to stop in small cities and towns along the way where I can talk to locals willing to share their fascinating stories and views on country life.”

Since starting his new role, Matt has been hard at work to raise awareness about the library’s services. During his first month alone, Matt traveled to area schools and libraries throughout the state stretching from Oklahoma City to Lawton. Matt has been fortunate to visit different Department of Rehabilitation Services offices to meet DRS staff members and learn about what they do. He also updates the library’s social media channels and website content.



When he’s not at work, Matt likes to watch University of Utah football, hike, fish, golf, volunteer to help those in need, and explore Oklahoma like a modern-day troubadour. He enjoys catching live music acts at some of the state’s most recognizable venues such as Cain’s Ballroom, the Diamond Ballroom, and the Tower Theatre.

Matt is available to give library tours to groups, classes, and organizations eager to learn more about the library and its unique history. To contact Matt directly, please send him an email at: matthew.thurber@okdrs.gov.

Cover Story

Introducing the Many a Page Podcast

“Many a page of life has turned, Many a lesson I have learned”

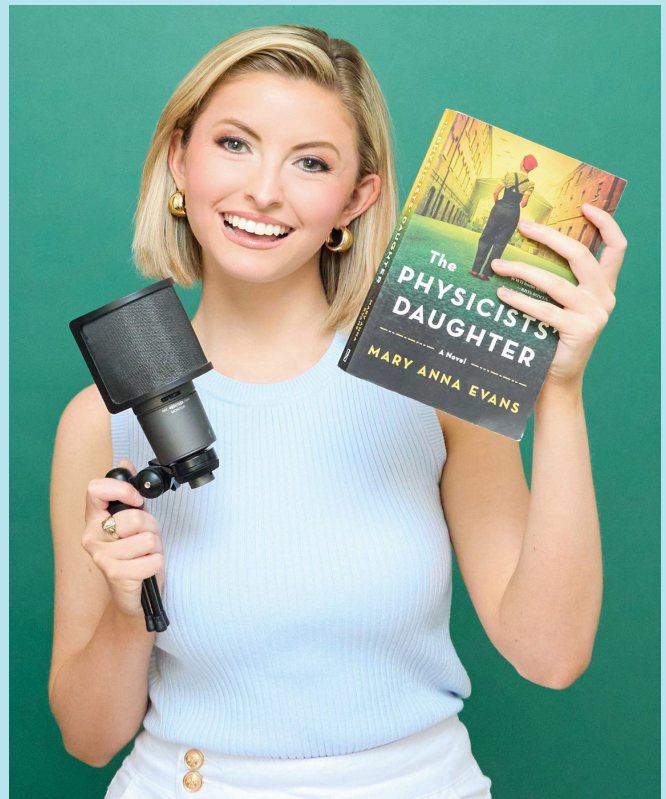
“Oklahoma Hills,” Woody Guthrie and Jack Guthrie

In this song Woody Guthrie, and his cousin and co-writer Jack, reminisce about the place they come from, a place with a playful breeze, black oil, and snow-white cotton. The lyrics welcome the listener into a tactile world where we too can imagine ourselves, even when we’re far away; even as life goes on. A good book will do the same.

I became a librarian because I love to read. I loved finding myself in books, as well as finding out more about the world I live in, both at home and far away. Loving books and reading and being able to share that with our patrons are some of what I enjoy so much about being a librarian. The feeling when people tell me they love a book I recommend is truly extraordinary. It’s a unique human connection that brings us closer together.

For years the library has been asked to organize a book club, and we have always wanted to, but, since our patrons live across the state, logistics have made getting together to talk about books very difficult. Until now! I am proud to announce Many a Page: The OK Library for the Blind Book Club Podcast.

The Physicists’ Daughter Narrator
Alyssa Payne



We will invite a guest each episode and ask them to choose a book they enjoy reading. Not necessarily a book they feel is important, or a classic that “everyone” must read to be well read. Often book club books deal with heavy themes and dark times, as though these types of stories are the only ones worth examining. Many a Page is about reading for pleasure, reading for fun, reading to hear a story, then getting together with friends to share their favorite parts of the book. That isn’t to say we won’t talk about deeper meanings and difficult topics, just that we will approach the discussion with an open and curious heart that leaves plenty of room for laughter as well as tears, or anger, or acceptance or anything else in the panoply of human emotion.

For the first episode, our guest is Alyssa Payne. Many of you will recognize Alyssa as one of our narrators. As an OTR reader, Alyssa reads and records headline articles from the Oklahoman, which can be played on-demand through the dial-up service. In the Recording Studio, Alyssa narrates and records audiobooks and magazines, such as Oklahoma Today.

The book she’s chosen for our premiere episode is *The Physicists’ Daughter* by Oklahoma author Mary Anna Evans.

Call the library to request your copy and subscribe to the podcast. Listeners don’t even have to read the book first! But if they do, they can participate in the discussion by answering these questions:

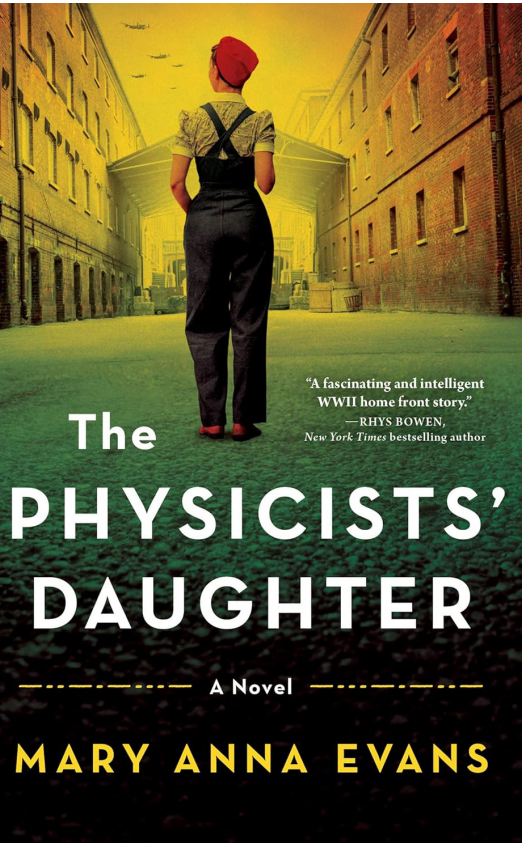
1. Hot Takes Round – One totally honest opinion about the book, no holding back. Did you like the book? Did you hate it? Did you like the book but hate what happened?
2. Most Memorable Scene – What part stuck with you the most? How come?

Continued on Page 12 >>



Oklahoma Reads

Showcasing books about Oklahoma



The Physicists' Daughter: A Novel by Mary Anna Evans DBC 18967

New Orleans, 1944.

Sabotage. That's the word on factory worker Justine Byrne's mind as she is repeatedly called to weld machine parts that keep failing with no clear cause. Could someone inside the secretive Carbon Division be deliberately undermining the factory's Allied war efforts?

Raised by her late parents to think logically, she also can't help wondering just what the oddly shaped carbon gadgets she assembles day after day have to do with the boats the factory builds. When a crane inexplicably crashes to the factory floor, leaving a woman dead, Justine can no longer ignore her nagging fear that German spies are at work within the building, trying to put the factory and its workers out of commission.

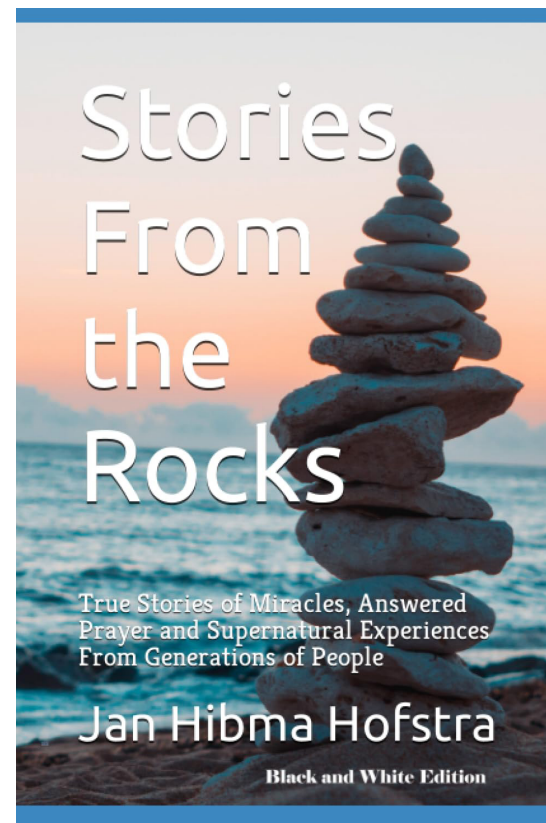
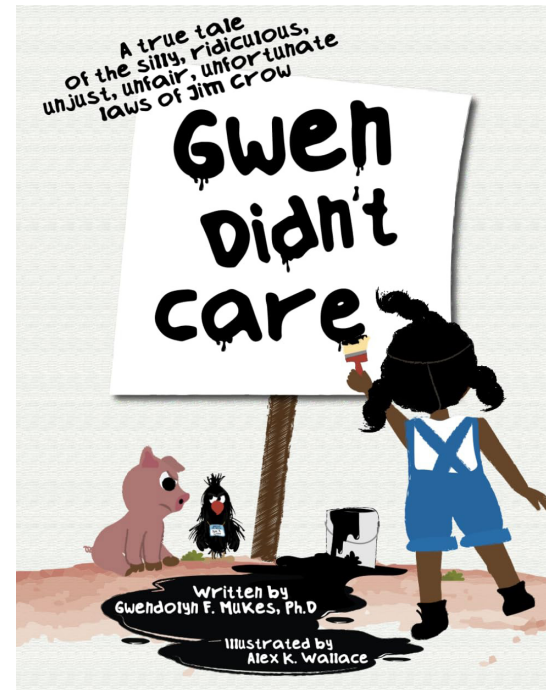
Unable to trust anyone—not the charming men vying for her attention, not her unpleasant boss, and not even the women who work beside her—Justine draws on the legacy of her unconventional upbringing to keep her division running and protect her coworkers, her country, and herself from a war that is suddenly very close to home.

Gwen Didn't Care: A True Tale of the Silly, Ridiculous, Unjust, Unfair, Unfortunate Laws of Jim Crow by Dr. Gwendolyn Fuller Mukes
DBC 18983

Gwen Didn't Care is a charming story, carefully crafted for children, that sheds light on our nation's unjust history of Jim Crow. Narrated by the author, lifelong educator and civil rights activist Dr. Gwendolyn Fuller Mukes, the book weaves a tale of an exciting childhood memory of a visit to the "one-day-a-week" zoo in 1948. The book is adorned with vivid illustrations that cleverly incorporate hidden details, promising to engage and captivate young readers every time they revisit its pages.

Stories from the Rocks: True Stories of Miracles, Answered Prayer and Supernatural Experiences from Generations of People by Jan Hibma Hofstra
DBC 18984

These true miraculous stories explode with real-life adventure! A tragic fire, a mysterious monster, a man poisoned by a co-worker, a bad wreck, a robbery, a ghost in the bedroom, these are only some of the real-life stories you will read in this book. Step into the journey with people from many generations! You will hear their voices and feel their plight through the portal of time. You will be inspired, experience God's presence, and feel His touch on your own life, too! Find faith for the first time, or build your faith up by leaps and bounds. (Recording was done by the author and converted into a DBC by our studio.)





3. Best Quote or Line – The one you underlined or keep thinking about.
4. Unanswerable Question – Something that sparked debate or had no clear answer.
5. Wild Card – Anything else you've to say about the book.

Email your comments to the library at olbph@okdrs.gov with the subject heading 'Book Club' before May 31, 2026, and we may include them in our discussion.

We are so excited to share this podcast with everyone. We want our patrons and listeners to know more about who we are here at the library, just as we want to learn more about our patrons like you. Please contact the library if you have any questions. Happy reading!

- Erin Byrne, Librarian

In Memoriam

Former Librarian Sammie Willis

The most captivating of Sammie's characteristics was that of a "teacher". Her teaching and school librarian careers were not left behind when she came to the library! Sammie was a born teacher and motivator in the way she shared information. She taught me much about the library and the ways we can help patrons, in addition to the role of NLS in our network library.

Also, a little-known fact about Sammie: she was an editor on several published writing projects. Sammie took her roles as patron advocate and reader adviser seriously, and it shaped many long-term friendships.

Sammie was not sure when she wanted to retire and worked long past her eligibility. When she eventually retired, she moved to North OKC and was excited to travel to Hogg Island, Maine, where the osprey [birds] made their summer home. Unfortunately, Sammie never made it back to Hogg Island as she suffered some falls and needed a walker in her golden years.

Sammie passed away on December 5, 2025 following a brief illness. The final time I saw Sammie was two months before her death, and despite her situation, she was delightful and happy to see me. I will miss my friend and teacher Sammie Willis, for all the reasons we miss good friends. My hope is that I can leave this world as gracefully as Sammie!

To read Sammie Willis' full obituary, visit: funeralok.com.

- Scott See, Recording Studio Technician



Volunteer Spotlight

Meet Ashleigh

I would like to introduce one of our very talented volunteers, Ashleigh Robinson. Ashleigh is our newest recording studio volunteer and currently narrating articles from Oklahoma Today Magazine.

Ashleigh (pictured left) is a lifelong Oklahoman and fierce advocate for Danielle (pictured right), her younger sister with Down syndrome. Ashleigh received her education from Oklahoma City University and Cornell.

She's an Oklahoma Partners in Policymaking graduate and member of Leadership OKC LOYAL Class XX. In 2021, she was crowned Miss Oklahoma and competed at the 100th Anniversary Miss America pageant.

She has been widely recognized for her advocacy and leadership, receiving acknowledgments like the 405 Magazine HER Award, Journal Record Achievers Under 40, NextGen Under 30, and the Arc of Oklahoma Advocate Award. Her board service includes Goodwill Central Oklahoma, Friends of the Oklahoma History Center, OMRF,

Oklahoma County Criminal Justice Authority, and the Oklahoma City Philharmonic. Ashleigh loves her church, St. Luke's, and leads in services on Sundays and mentors students on Wednesdays.

Professionally, she works at Bethany Children's Health Center, raising funds and awareness for their mission of maximizing the potential of children of all abilities. In her free time, she loves traveling and live jazz.

Ashleigh first learned about the OLBPH through her advocacy for people of all abilities. "When my sister Danielle was growing up, and my family



was looking for the resources available to her, we had no idea this existed! Expanding my knowledge about the things Oklahomans with disabilities could find support through was just the beginning for me with the library!”

When asked what the experience has been like volunteering with OLBPH, Ashleigh states, “Narrating is so much fun! I have a performer background and have always enjoyed hosting, and this felt like a natural fit. I got started after someone mentioned it to me at a film project I was doing and asked if I’d ever consider volunteering my voice for narration. I’ve been reading bimonthly ever since. I am excited for the other projects I’ll be able to do in service to Oklahoma in the future.”

When asked what she enjoys most about volunteering for the library, Ashleigh states, “I enjoy hearing and telling stories from across Oklahoma. The team at the library is fun to work with, and that makes a difference.”

The whole studio team feels fortunate to work with Ashleigh. She always comes in with such a professional mindset and is fully prepared for recording whatever materials we have requested of her. She also keeps a positive attitude and cares about who we serve and why we do this work.

- Kat Jensen, Recording Studio Director

Annual Meeting Notice

Oklahoma Special Library Services, the library friends group, invites you to our Annual Meeting on May 21st at noon. The location is 4135 NW 10th St., OKC West Side Lions Town Hall. Lunch will be provided. Trey Lewis and Jerri Cooper will each tell us about their new books. There will be door prizes, election of new Board members, and fun. Paid membership is needed to vote in the election. Membership dues are \$10 for patrons of the library and \$15 for non-patrons. To RSVP, email anitawhaley1955@gmail.com or leave a message at 405-630-5457. We look forward to seeing all our friends of the OLBPH.

- Anita Kathy Whaley, OSLS Annual Committee Chairperson

Holiday Closures

The OLBPH will be closed on the following days:

- New Year's Day - Thursday, January 1, 2026
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day - Monday, January 19, 2026
- President's Day - Monday, February 16, 2026
- Memorial Day - Monday, May 25, 2026
- Independence Day (Observed) - Friday, July 3, 2026
- Labor Day - Monday, September 7, 2026
- Veterans Day - Wednesday, November 11, 2026
- Thanksgiving - Thursday/Friday, November 26 and 27, 2026
- Christmas - Thursday/Friday December 25 and 26, 2026

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**FREE MATTER
FOR THE BLIND**